

PRISON POPULATION COMPARISON

by Karen Firestone, Fiscal Analyst

This article presents a comparison of Michigan's corrections system with the corrections systems of four surrounding states, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Figure 1 illustrates the relative incarceration, probation, and parole rate per 100,000 citizens for Michigan and the surrounding states. Michigan has the highest incarceration rate, Indiana has the highest probation rate, and Illinois leads the surrounding states in the number of parolees per 100,000 citizens. In total number, however, Michigan has more offenders than the surrounding states have.

In fact, throughout the 1990s, Michigan has been among the leading states in the country in terms of prison, parole, and probation population size. While the surrounding states have experienced acute growth in their corrections systems during the decade, Michigan's corrections system growth has been more measured. These differences in corrections systems, the size and growth of prison, parole, and probation populations are a reflection of a state's demographics and the criminal justice policy pursued by the state. When comparisons among corrections systems are made, the changes occurring in these systems emerge.

Prison Population

As seen in Table 1, between 1990 and 1996, most of the surrounding states experienced greater prison population growth than did Michigan. On the other hand, in 1997, Michigan's incarceration rate of 443 per 100,000 citizens was much higher than Ohio's at 408, or Illinois' at 324, two states with comparably sized prison populations. One possible interpretation of the data is that Michigan has led other states in adopting aggressive incarceration policies, and that as these other states adopt more aggressive policies, their prison populations will grow faster than Michigan's. Another interpretation is that Michigan, having incarcerated a large prison population, has reached a plateau in the number of people who are available for incarceration.

Parole Population

Parole is conditional release from a prison facility that may be granted upon completion of the sentence, or after completion of some portion of the sentence term, as determined by a paroling authority. The number of prisoners available to parole is heavily influenced by the criminal justice policy adopted by the state, the time at which parole may be considered, and the length of the minimum sentence imposed either by a judge or by statute. As average length of minimum sentence (the measure for the minimum sentence of all prisoners) begins to increase, the number of prisoners in the base population eligible for parole decreases. In turn, the number of prisoners who are actually serving on parole as a percentage of base prison population decreases. Of course, the decrease in parole population will begin only after the increase in average sentence length exceeds the current average sentence length and the effect will last only as long as average length of sentence is increasing.

Figure 1

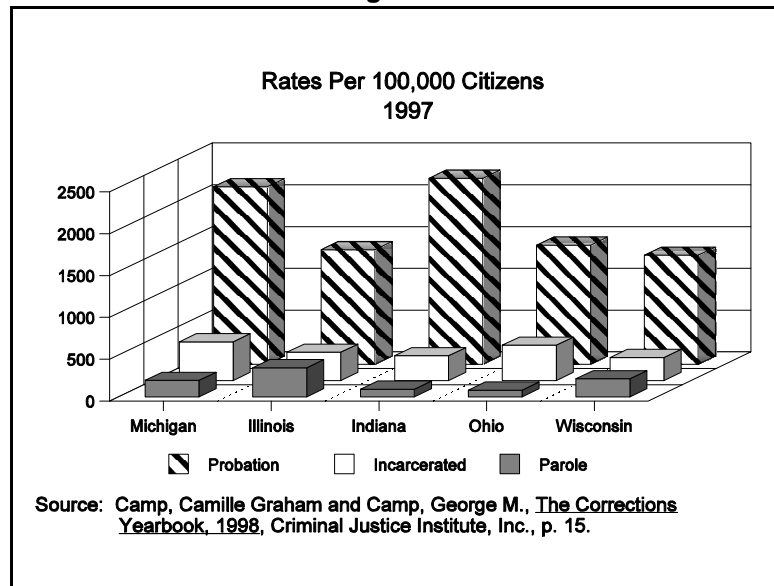


Table 1 PRISON POPULATION								
State	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1990-1996 Growth
Michigan . Population	34,267	36,423	39,113	39,318	40,631	41,112	42,349	24%
Incarceration Rates	366	388	413	414	421	432	443	21%
National Rank	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	
Illinois . . . Population	27,516	29,115	31,640	34,495	36,531	37,658	38,852	41%
Incarceration Rates	234	247	271	294	308	316	324	38%
National Rank	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Indiana . . Population	12,736	13,008	13,945	14,470	15,014	16,125	15,766	24%
Incarceration Rates	223	226	242	250	256	273	284	27%
National Rank	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	
Ohio Population	31,501	35,446	37,997	40,253	40,253	44,338	45,968	46%
Incarceration Rates	289	324	347	365	375	397	408	41%
National Rank	6	6	6	5	6	5	5	
Wisconsin Population	7,247	7,686	8,191	8,781	10,022	11,199	12,530	73%
Incarceration Rates	149	157	176	166	200	218	250	68%
National Rank	28	29	28	27	26	24	24	
Source: Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Incarceration Rates 1990-1993: <u>Source Books of Criminal Justice Statistics</u> , 1994, BJS; 1994-1996: Camp, Camille Graham and Camp, George M., <u>The Corrections Yearbook</u> , 1998, Criminal Justice Institute, Inc., p. 15.								

When Table 2 is examined, however, other factors seem to affect the size of the parole population. For example, Wisconsin, which in recent years has instituted truth-in-sentencing, has the highest rate of increase in its parole population. This may result from the growth of the overall prison population and the presence of a larger prison population from which to parole prisoners. Thus, sentence length and sentencing policy intersect to determine the size of the parole population. In another example, Michigan's parole population grew 23% from 1990 to 1996 and its prison population increased 24% in the same time period. The fact that parole population growth is smaller than prison population growth suggests that there is some increase in sentence length that is contributing to the growth of the prison population.

Table 2
YEAR-END PAROLE POPULATION/PAROLE POPULATION
AS PERCENTAGE OF PRISON POPULATION

National Rank (1996)	State	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1990-1996 Change
11	Michigan	11,901 35%	12,275 34%	13,436 34%	14,015 36%	12,846 32%	13,862 34%	14,609 34%	23%
6	Illinois	17,671 64%	23,213 80%	23,304 74%	24,177 70%	26,695 73%	29,541 78%	30,064 77%	70%
17	Wisconsin	4,099 57%	4,179 54%	5,560 68%	6,615 75%	7,065 70%	7,548 67%	8,121 65%	98%
19	Ohio	7,945 25%	6,738 19%	7,407 19%	6,997 17%	6,453 16%	7,432 17%	6,331 14%	-20%
27	Indiana	3,778 30%	3,125 24%	2,899 21%	2,891 20%	3,409 23%	3,200 20%	3,575 23%	-5%

Source: Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics

Probation Population

Probation is the punishment of an offender within the community, and a term of probation may include a period of incarceration in a county jail. In 1996, Michigan with 148,595 probationers had the fifth largest probation population among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. (It should be noted that Michigan's probation population includes both district court probationers, who are not eligible for a prison sentence, and circuit court probationers, who could have been sentenced to prison if they had not received probation.) Despite the size of Michigan's probation population, however, its growth has been fairly flat, as seen in Table 3. In part, the growth is low in comparison to other states because the base population is larger than in the other states. Further, Michigan may have a larger probation population because the State instituted community corrections efforts in 1988 to reduce prison admissions, resulting in more offenders' serving sentences within the community.

Summary

The data suggest that Michigan has low growth rates in corrections populations compared with other states. This is not to imply, however, that Michigan's corrections populations are not growing or that Michigan will not have to address issues of growth in the corrections budget. As long as Michigan's prison, parole, and probation population grows, the need to expand facilities and increase programs will continue.

Table 3
PROBATION POPULATION

National Rank (1997)	State	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1990-1996 Change
5	Michigan	133,439	136,855	135,012	139,753	142,640	141,436	148,595	11.4%
9	Illinois	95,699	74,846	76,125	78,464	104,664	109,489	115,503	20.7%
11	Ohio	83,380	83,668	94,129	103,377	90,190	103,327	102,755	23.2%
13	Indiana	68,683	76,365	79,850	82,705	83,177	95,267	99,590	45.0%
17	Wisconsin	29,370	31,478	40,424	43,125	45,901	47,269	51,669	75.9%

Source: Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics